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## Newspaper headline on Henry Seybert, 1883 April

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## A Tribute to a Generous and Public-Spirited Citizen.

To the Editor of the Evening Telegraph.

The large estate left by this octogenarian gentleman, and his somewhat extraordinary will, have led to publications of his life and character which do not do him full justice; they are brief and partial accounts, embracing only a portion, and that the least satisfactory, of a long life. The immediate association with and notoriety of the very numerous bequests to public institutions, and the expressed wish that his body should be "cremated," would seem to have overshadowed other personal characteristics of Mr. Seybert, and the useful pursuits of his earlier years. There has also been an unfortunate estimate made of his life and true character, caused by his persistent faith and deep interest during the last twenty years of his life in the delusions of what is known as "Spiritualism." This sad weakness resulted in Mr. Seybert's being surrounded by numerous charlatans and impostors, yecept "mediums," who successfully duped the kind-hearted man into contributing liberal sums of money, with the sincere expectation, on his part, of demonstrating the truth or falsehood of his faith. He was an honest believer in it, and was quite confident that he would finally succeed in establishing its truth. Even when he detected an attempted imposition upon him (of which the writer of this was twice a witness), Mr. Seybert would not yield his faith in the doctrine, saying that this was "a false medium"—like "a counterfeit note, which did not make good notes worthless." Yet, but for the invited guest who detected and exposed the trick on these occasions, the exhibition would have added another solid proof to the wonderful mysteries of "Spiritualism." Mr. Seybert finally became a confirmed monomaniac on that subject; he lost all power to reason against his delusion, and died in the firm conviction of its reality. Hence a "medium" continued to visit him daily during his fatal illness, to whom he left an income of \$800 during life.

But there was a longer and better part of Mr. Seybert's life that compensates for and redeems the unfortunate period of belief in "Spiritualism." Associated with this period, by-the-way, must be that feature of his will which gives \$60,000 to the University of Pennsylvania for a chair of "Mental and Moral Philosophy," with the condition that its Professor shall make careful investigation into the (so called) phenomena of "Spiritualism," for the purpose of establishing their truth or falsehood.

It is much pleasanter to revert to the story of Mr. Seybert's earlier scientific labors, and this has been so tersely related by Professor B. Silliman, in his "American Contributions to Chemistry," an address delivered at Northumberland, Pa., in 1874, on the occasion of the centennial of the discovery of oxygen by Joseph Priestly. Professor Silliman says, speaking of Henry Seybert: "Like his father, Adam Seybert, he was educated in the School of Mines in Paris, and was an early contributor to our knowledge of the constitution of American minerals. In 1822 he analyzed the sulphuret of molybdenum from Chester, Pa.; chromate of iron from Maryland and Pennsylvania; the tabular spar pyroxene and colophonite of Willsborough, N. Y., and the Maclureite (chondrodite) of New Jersey, (in which he independently discovered fluorine as Dr. Lanstaff had done before). He also analyzed the manganesian garnet found with the chrysoberyl at Haddam, Conn., and the chrysoberyl of the same locality. In 1830 he analyzed the Tennessee meteorite of Bowen, since which date I have been unable to find any further contributions from Mr. Seybert, whose attention was unfortunately diverted from science, to which his early life was so advantageously devoted, to other and less fruitful lines of investigation."

From the same address on the "American Contributions to Chemistry," it seems appropriate to quote a brief and interesting reference to Mr. Adam Seybert, of whom Henry was the only son:—

## His Bequest for the Investigation of "Spiritualism." 22 Apr. '83

To the Editor of the Evening Telegraph.

The Telegraph of the 20th inst. contains a tribute to the late Henry Seybert, signed "Amicus," regarding which the writer requests the privilege of making a few comments. I knew Mr. Seybert for some years, and feel assured that my sentiments will be in accord with those of all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance, when I say that in the qualities and graces that combine to constitute the true gentleman Mr. Seybert was equalled by but few men, and surpassed by none. That he may have often erred in judgment (and who does not?) is possible, but then he always had the courage to act in accordance with his convictions, whilst in point of candor and truthfulness he probably reached as near perfection as it is possible for humanity to arrive at. Instigated (as I have heard him say) by the example of his friends, the late scientists of high repute, Robert Hare, of Philadelphia, and Harrison Gray Dyar, of New York, Mr. Seybert became an early and earnest investigator of the phenomena incident to "Modern Spiritualism," and, like those distinguished men, became a convert to the faith in which they all died with unswerving trust. Not long before his death Mr. Seybert gave (I think apart from his will) \$60,000 to be appropriated to the endowment of a chair of "Moral and Mental Philosophy, the Investigation of Truth, and especially of Modern Spiritualism," as I understood him to say on several occasions within a few weeks of his passing away. At one time, when the question was mooted whether the officers of the University would enter upon and conduct the proposed investigation in the spirit of fairness and impartiality, Mr. Seybert scouted the idea of their not doing so, repeating what I have more than once heard him say before, that he had given the money for that object especially, and that, as honorable men, which he believed them to be, they could not fail to carry out his wishes in good faith.

At the last interview I had with Mr. Seybert, but two or three days, at furthest, before his death, he dwelt with much earnestness on the subject of the gift, proving to me that its objects lay as near, or nearer, to his heart than any other. I may here remark that I do not speak altogether unadvisedly when I say that I believe the gentlemen of the University who have the matter especially in charge are sincerely disposed to carry out Mr. Seybert's wishes to the letter, so soon as the proper opportunities are afforded them; and that, after a full and impartial investigation they will make a report according to their best judgment in accordance with the facts that are brought to their knowledge, whether they go to sustain the truth of "Modern Spiritualism" or to prove its falsehood—which is all, I know, Mr. Seybert expects from them. Whether the phenomena of "Modern Spiritualism" are in the main truths, as thousands of talented and advanced thinkers, both in Europe and America, after years of careful investigation, affirm them to be, or whether they are all mere "delusions," as "Amicus" dogmatically asserts, after little or no experience worth naming, does not affect the object sought for by Mr. Seybert's gift, which is to determine whether the phenomena are true or false, whether they are a reality or a delusion. FAIR PLAY.

Philadelphia, April 23, 1883.

"Adam Seybert is one of the few American chemists who enjoyed the advantage, rare at that time, of a training in the School of Mines at Paris, late in the last century. He has left few papers, but his memoir, read before the American Philosophical Society, March 10, 1797, entitled 'Experiments and Observations on Land and Sea Air,' is of interest as the earliest example of such a research on our records. It relates the results of twenty-seven analyses of air made by the author at sea in a voyage across the Atlantic, and also the comparison of these results with other analyses made by him on land, near Philadelphia, by which comparison he reaches the conclusion that the air over the sea is purer than that over the land; that, while the latter varies with locality, the former is nearly constant; and he then ventures the suggestion that 'perhaps the impurities are absorbed by the agitation of the waves'—a conclusion to which modern investigation, by the use of more exact methods, has also arrived. Considering the imperfect condition of endiometric methods in Seybert's time, his research and conclusions therefrom are decidedly creditable to his skill and sagacity." The son continued for some years after his father's death (1825) to occupy himself with

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